

MUNOFS VI Research Report

Forum: General Assembly I

Issue: Border Security for Neighboring Countries of Syria

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Introduction

Up to 2012, the question of the Syrian situation had been primarily focused on topics such as military superiority, supply of armaments, and the political clout of different factions. However, along with the increase in duration of the conflict, casualties from the bloodshed have also drastically increased. Although casualties were initially limited to soldiers from Assad's (Refer to key-terms defined) army and the Free Syrian Army, increased numbers of third party members have also started to become impacted. Not only did they become deliberate targets, but also have they started to suffer from far-reaching ramifications of the conflict.

Because the nature of the conflict is much rooted in secular conflict between the factions of Syrian Shia and Sunni Muslims, the conflict has naturally spread to include Shia and Sunni Muslims from all around the Middle Eastern world. Due to the fact that the implications of the Syrian conflict are far reaching in terms of the power balance in the middle east, many Shia and Sunni groups in neighboring countries have taken interest. Countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia is having a proxy war amongst each other on the Syrian battlefield, while countries like Iraq and Lebanon have been sending soldiers – consisted of both Shia and Sunni fighters – to Syria. Meanwhile, Turkey and Jordan have been severely influenced by the influx of refugees from Syria.

Definition of Key Terms

Bashar Al-Assad

Bashar Al-Assad has been the president of Syria from 2000, after Hafez Al-Assad passed away. Hafez ruled Syria for 29 years, and stabilized the power of the central government through his iron fist policies. During his youth, he was educated and grown as a medical expert, but he abruptly took up politics after his older brother died from a car crash. Though ostensibly extremely radical, he hasn't brought much change to Syria since 2000. While he is an open critic of the US, and he acquiesces that democracy will be an effective tool for Syria's progress.

Ba'ath Party

The concept of Ba'athism transcends tangible borders of the Arabic nations since it advocates the transnational idea of "unity, liberty, and socialism" of the entire Arab world. Its ultimate goal is to make

one unified Arab state. In case of Syria, the Ba'ath party has been Syria's ruling power ever since the Syrian coup d'état in 1963. With 134 seats out of 250, they constitute approximately a 60% majority of the Syrian parliament. The role of the Ba'ath party in setting off discontent is quite minimal: it can be rather seen as al-Assad's failure to uphold Ba'athist values that led to the discontent.

Alawite, Shiite, and Sunni Muslims

Although Syria is nominally led by the Ba'ath party, genuine executive power lies with the Alawite elites, a minority sect of Syria. Ideologically, they follow the doctrines of the Shiite Muslims, who only regard Ali and his heirs as the legitimate successor of Mohammed. The Shiite's ideological is the Sunni, who make up 90% of the whole Islamic world and constitute up to 70% of the Syrian population. Unlike the Shiites, they, The Sunni branch of Islam, recognize all of Mohammed's successors as rightful leaders of the Muslims. Alawite Muslim is the dominant minority group in Syria, even if they only make up 12% of the Syrian population. The majority of the population consist of Sunni Muslims, who constitute up to 70% of Syria's population.

Scorched Earth

"Scorched earth" tactics refers to a military strategy that involves deliberate and widespread collateral destruction of an area that the military occupies. It usually takes the form of burning or bombing houses and factories that may be of potential use to the enemy. The Bashar Al-Assad has been using the scorched earth tactics to devastate areas that are highly concentrated with civilians that tend to sympathize with and support the rebels. Initially focused on destroying property and infrastructure, the bombings and fires executed by the army have started to threaten the lives of more and more civilians, to a level where they appear to be deliberate targets of the regime.

Humanitarian Aid

Humanitarian Aid can be defined as any type of supportive action designed to help save human lives, protect human dignity, and alleviate any suffering. Usually, they are deemed as temporary solutions immediately after an outbreak of a disaster and includes providing material relief, emergency food aid, relief coordination, and also reconstruction and rehabilitation of infrastructure damaged by the disaster. In the case of Syria, since the conflict is ongoing, providing long-term humanitarian aid such as the reconstruction of public infrastructure like schools and hospitals, is close to impossible. Many non-governmental, non-political, multilateral organizations are primarily focusing on food and medical supplies. However, if the conflict is to be further extended, humanitarian aid must also be expanded to include educational and infrastructural aid.

Hezbollah

Hezbollah, though nominally a Shiite militia, has great authority in Lebanon and controls most of Lebanon. Furthermore, Hezbollah is an extremely skilled militia, especially in guerrilla warfare, primarily because they had a 30 year confrontation with Israel. Most of their armaments and weapons comes from Iran, which is supplied straight through Syria. They fear if the al-Assad regime is to be toppled, their import of

weapons would significantly decrease, as well as their political and military clout.

Chemical Weapons

Chemical Weapons are lethal weapons that were categorized as Weapons of Mass destruction (WMD) along with nuclear, biological, and radiological weapons. Chemical weapons are usually weapons where a toxic chemical (eg. tear gas) is injected into a delivery artillery systems like bombs, rockets, and shells. Efforts to prevent the use of Chemical weapons dates back to The Hague and Geneva conventions before the World War 2, and have consistently persisted afterwards. Currently, the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) is responsibly for the control of the production, stockpiling, and the use of chemical weapons. They have regular inspections in chemical factories and have strived to eradicate its usage.

General Overview

At its inception, the Syrian uprising was just like any other movement of the Arab Spring – a series of anti-government protests that was triggered by the demise Tunisian regime in 2011. However, the moment the Al-Assad responded with brute force to break down the demonstrations, the once peaceful protests rapidly developed into an armed rebellion, which matured into a civil war. The causes behind the uprising cannot possibly restricted to a single factor to blame, as a synthesis of various factors made it possible for such a fierce uprising.

The most predominant force behind the uprising was undeniably the prolonged dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad. Opposition groups believe he led a corrupt, incompetent, and misrepresentative government. After the death of his father (Hafez Al-Assad) Bashar al-Assad quickly abandoned all plans for reforms. He instead sought ways to secure his own authority. By exploiting the one party system, Bashar Al-Assad was able to transform an already heavily central government into a oligarchic government led by the elites within the ruling family. Surprisingly, though extremely, undemocratic, the dictatorship was relatively stable for more than a decade. As the regime left little room for legitimate political dissent, however, instability and discontent was naturally to grow. This chokehold eventually induced the agitated Syrians to express their discontent through protests.

Syrian opposition groups believed that the al-Assad regime was misrepresentative not so much as the regime's Alawi (Shia) nature as their misrepresentation of Ba'athist ideals, which advocated, a unified Arab state. As time passed, the Syrian civilians realized that the ineffective government was becoming increasingly more corrupt. Syrians with personal ties with al-Assad became much better off than normal civilians and the numerous deadly militant groups were beginning to obtain lethal weapons and ammunition through bribery of government officials. Inability to reform the economy crippled from lost battles with Israel compounded to popular distress, and access to new media allowed the planning and premeditation of mass events. The proliferation of satellite TV, better Internet communication and increased mobile phone networks enabled the agitated Syrians to organize and finally execute an uprising.

Major Countries Involved

Turkey

With a Sunni government, Turkey is most dedicated and helpful neighbor towards Syrian rebels. Not only do they supply the Syrian opposition's with armaments, the Turkish government tolerates the rebel's use of the Turkish-Syrian border as their supply route. However, the extensive Turkish-Syrian border of 800 kilometers started to raise numerous security issues. As the bloodshed is being prolonged, the Turkish-Syrian border has become increasingly more fraught with various armed militant groups like al-Nursa and al-Qaeda.

Large numbers of Syrians have started to exploit the long, rather poorly secured, porous border. During June of 2013, border patrols detained approximately 12,000 illegals without proper Syrian identification near the border. Although security has been tightened with the help of international organizations like NATO recently, 200 border posts is a majorly lacking value when it comes to effective border control 800 kilometers. However, as time progresses the Turkish-Syrian border is being equipped with thermal cameras, night vision glasses, armored vehicles that will potentially further the state of security.

The movement of Syrian refugees along the border isn't the only problem Turkey has encountered numerous instances of violence that were stimulated by the al-Assad army. Because the Turkish are officially siding with the Syrian opposition, Syria has also adopted an open aggression policy towards Turkish personnel. Turkish Planes have continually been shot down by Syrian missiles, and the mortar shells fired from Syria have killed numerous Turkish citizens. Turkish armed forces have also started to return fire, and the Turkish-Syrian relationship has deteriorated ever since.

Lebanon

Unlike other Syrian neighbors, Lebanon doesn't stand as a completely united voice when it comes to the Syrian conflict. Simply put, the Lebanese Hezbollah actively support the al-Assad regime, while the Lebanese government generally try to remain impartial and non-participant. Their official policy is disassociation from the Syrian battle. They have concerns that intervention would threaten Lebanon's security, which unsurprisingly turned out to be true. Because of such fissure, Lebanon's internal stability has been threatened. Not only has Lebanon been subject to heavy armed attacks, the division of ideology has caused great internal tension among pro-Assads and pro-neutrality. After Hezbollah's leader declared open armed support of the regime, they have been barraged with rockets and curried with car bombs at the Beirut, a populated suburb controlled by Hezbollah. Unfortunately, these missiles and attacks have gone awry numerous times, thus affecting Lebanese civilians living in adjacent areas.

Hezbollah seems to be as committed to fighting for the Assad regime as the Syrian oppositions are to be fighting in the Free Syrian Army. Even with voluntary system of recruitment, thousands of fighters have enlisted in the Hezbollah on a regular basis. Surprisingly, despite the fact the Hezbollah only allows soldiers with family connections within its army, an increasingly large proportion of Lebanese parents have grown to be passionate about sending their sons to war. However, as the conflict is becoming more and more prolonged, there has been numerous instances where the Free Syrian Army openly fired rockets at

Lebanese suburbs and Hezbollah headquarters, which have inflicted collateral damage among the civilians.

Israel

Although Israel and Syria are technically at war, the relationship's between the two have been relatively stable over the past few years. Although Israel has fired on Syrian hostilities several times, they were mainly of defensive purpose and only did so when the Syrians tanks and armored vehicles crossed over to the Israeli Golan Heights. They have caused almost no casualties among the Syrians, and only regularly send warning shots to the Syrians.

Popular to contrary belief, Israel has adopted a neutral stance on the Syrian conflict, and have been reluctant to be involved ever since its outbreak. One of the main concerns of Israel is that al-Assad's regime is trying to spark a war with Israel, because doing so would bring in the Hezbollah and Hamas. If a conflict is started, Israel is concerned that the Islamist militant groups would gain access to the devastating chemical weapons of Syria and Russia. Thus, the Israelis are currently mainly concerned about Hezbollah and chemical weapons falling into their hands. Because Israel has been working with al-Assad since 2000, she has grown quite familiar with al-Assad's regime. Though the al-Assad regime could possibly cause potential problems if a conflict is triggered, Israel considers the al-Assad regime as a predictable, cautious, conservative regime. In contrast, however, Israel considers the opposition group as radical Islamist extremists, who are not unified and rather inexperienced.

If the Free Syrian Army was to topple the regime, however, Israel would benefit because doing so will disintegrate the alliance between the Hezbollah, Iran, and Syria. Geographically, because Syria is the "stepping stone" from Iran to Lebanon, the transport of supplies like chemical weapons and armaments would be much harder under the new government for the "liberation" of Syria by the Free Syrian Army. Therefore although Israel would prefer the al-Assad regime to be toppled, she fears that there would be great instability in the process

Iran

As a Shia Muslim power, Iran is a staunch ally of the al-Assad regime as much as Saudi Arabia is of the Syrian opposition. Iran has been consistently and regularly providing arms, military training and cash. If the al-Assad regime was to fail, Iran might possibly be the party that will be most negatively impacted, as the Syria-Iran-Lebanese Hezbollah axis would be disintegrated. Iran's primary interest in Syria is that it acts as a route to shipping armaments to the Hezbollah. Once the Free Syrian Army topples the Shia al-Assad regime, Iran fears that the new Sunni Syria would no longer be willing to cooperate with Iran and Hezbollah. Because of such implications associated with the fall of al-Assad's regime, Iran has officially decided to side with al-Assad, which has caused great tension with Saudi Arabia. Just as the Korean War was a proxy war of the Cold War (between the USSR and USA), the Syrian conflict has turned into a proxy war between a cold war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Recently, as desperate measures, Iran has been sending numerous technical expertise to prevent Syrian opposition's use of internet and social media as their methods of communicating. By doing so, Iran hopes to prevent Syria from being a platform that harbours activity against any Hezbollah activities.

Iraq

After the US troops knocked down Saddam Hussein, the ruling Sunni regime also subsided, making the Shiite majority the dominant ruling group. Iraq has been rather internally unstable ever since – their relationships with USA still remains tense, and they have relinquished their close ties with Russia. Iraq plays an especially crucial role in the conflict as they form an extensive border with Syria, and there is a lot militant of movement along these borders. Interestingly, unlike other bordering countries of Syria, soldiers are pouring into Syria as much as refugees are pouring out of Syria.

Iraq's participation in the conflict is unique because unlike other adjacent countries, where they simply experience spillovers from the civil conflict. In the case with Iraq, Iraqi soldiers are “spilling into” Syria not so much as Syrians are is spilling into Iraq. Both Sunni and Shia fighters have crossed the border and are rather avidly participating in the Syrian conflict. The Sunni Iraqis have joined up with the Syrian opposition, while the Shiite soldiers have been cooperating with al-Assad's army. The Sunni Iraqis have joined in hopes that the toppling of al-Assad's Shia regime might possibly bode well for all the Sunni minorities in Iraq, who claim to have been marginalized and discriminated by the government. The Shiite majority, on the other hand, has joined to maintain their dominance. If al-Assad's government does collapse, the Iraqi government fears that it will bring instability to Iraq as its western borders will be fraught with al-Qaeda linked Sunni militant groups and Syrian Jihadists.

Also, Iraq isn't feeling a major burden in terms of refugees, because of its strict policies towards the influx of Syrian refugees. Although the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) is actively seeking ways to host Syrian refugees, the Baghdad government has only opened up 2 camps (al-Qaim and al-Waleed), and have closed the only border crossing which expands a distance of 400km. This is probably because the Iraqi Shia government is worried about Sunni refugees spilling into their Shiite majority country.

Jordan

As Syria's southern neighbor, the situation is Jordan slightly different from those of Syria's northern neighbors. Although initially one of the top receiver of Syrian refugees, the Jordanian attitudes have been changing as the refugees started to put a massive strain the Jordanian economy. With more than 540,000 Syrian refugees within Jordanian soil, Jordan is experiencing a water deficit in arid areas by 50%. To make things worse, there has been an approximate 20% increase in the demand for electricity. The Jordanian Prime Minister has publicly referred to Syrian refugee camps in Jordan as humanitarian disaster zones. Without the help of international organization, the Jordanian economy is almost on the verge of collapse. As a result of such external strain, Jordan has tightened restrictions on her borders. The flow of refugees to Jordan decreased from 2,000 per day to only 100 a day. Jordan has recently announced that unless the refugee carries a undeniable proof of his or her identity, he or she will be considered a security threat and be refused entry into Jordan until verification. It isn't only the economic concerns that have made Jordan reluctant to let Syrians entry into Jordan. As more and more Sunnis flee to Jordan, violence has increased in the borders. Jordan has become fearful that al-Assad will send

terrorists across the border to destabilize Jordan if it continues to back the rebels. Because Jordan is one of the only countries where Southern Syrians can seek refugees, the international community must quickly reduce the burden Jordan has to carry.

Russia

When the conflict first broke out, Russia was a staunch pro-government supporter. Because Russia naturally had amiable relationships with Syria before the uprising, they naturally decided to side with the current government. Russia has helped al-Assad mainly by shipping weapons and armed vehicles to the Hezbollah. However, as the conflict is becoming prolonged, the Russia's stance on the matter seems to be slightly changing. Firstly, their position on the conflict has become one of containment – their primary aim is to limit the damage inflicted. As a result, Russia has surprisingly started giving more attention to the humanitarian crisis in Syria. Recently, Vladimir Putin has publicly stated that Russia's utmost priority in the Syrian conflict is to minimize the Syrian victims that are being sacrificed in this conflict, "not retain al-Assad and his regime." Officially, Russia has adopted a neutral stance, and it doesn't seem likely that they will be taking any sides for a while. It almost seems that Russia has recognized that the al-Assad regime wouldn't last forever, and seems to be regretting its initial decision. However, Russia is still known for providing the majority of arms for the Hezbollah and the al-Assad regime. Furthermore, they are still exploiting their veto power when it comes to making decisions in the Security Council

Timeline of Events

- 1947: Foundation of the Baath Party
- 1966: Hafez al-Assad becomes Minister of Defense
- 1967: Israel occupies Golan Heights from Syria and devastate the Syrian airforce
- 1973: Syria fails to reoccupy Golan Heights
- 2000: Bashar al-Assad succeeds his father
- 2006: Attack on US embassy in Damascus
- March 2011: Protests start in Damascus
- July 2011: Opposition forces meet and organize in Istanbul
- December 2012: USA, Turkey, Britain, France organize National Coalition of Syrian Opposition
- May 2013: Syria and Israel exchange fire at Golan Heights

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

- December 19th, 2011; United Nations General Assembly; Resolution 66/176
- February 23rd, 2012; United Nations General Assembly; Resolution 66/176
- April 29th, 2011; United Nations Human Rights council; Resolution S-16/1

- August 23rd, 2011; Human Rights Council; Resolution S-17/1
- December 2nd, 2011; Human Rights Council; Resolution S-18/1
- January 22nd, 2012; League of Arab States; Resolution 7444
- February 12th, 2012; League of Arab States; Resolution 7446

Possible Solutions

The political realm of the conflict is too complex for the international community to solve the issue immediately, and although efforts should be made to promptly put an end to the conflict, the process definitely should not be rushed. The most viable option to put a cease to the Syrian bloodshed is some kind of intervention. However, there are problems associated with foreign intervention. In the first place, it is highly unlikely that the UN Security would immediately arrive at a decisive, unfaltering conclusion, as Russia and China are still likely to express opposition against the idea of any form of interference in the Syrian conflict. The US themselves have tried to remain rather detached from any foreign intervention especially after the debacles experienced from previous interferences in Iraq and Afghanistan. Recently, the US have stepped up their policies by providing light armaments in addition to non-lethal weapons. Generally, however they remain relatively dormant. Also, even if the current Bashar al-Assad regime was to be toppled, the Free Syrian Army is composed of such a vast array of opposition groups with differing ideals.

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